DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 340 CG 018 433

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TITLE A Selected Bibliography on Employee Attitude Surveys. Special Report.
INSTITUTION Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, N.C.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-912879-51-3
PUB DATE Aug 81
NOTE 51p.
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Creative Leadership, 5000 Laurinda Drive, P.O. Box P-1, Greensboro, NC 27402-1660.
PUB TYPE Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Measures; Data Analysis; Data Interpretation; *Employee Attitudes; Job Satisfaction; Motivation; Productivity; *Surveys; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This bibliography provides an up-to-date compilation of literature covering all aspects of the employee attitude survey process. It is intended for both researcher and practitioner. A wide variety of sources are represented with a focus on the past 10-12 years of attitude survey research. The 473 citations compiled are categorized under 7 separate headings: (1) understanding job satisfaction, attitudes, and motivation theories; (2) assessing organizational commitment; (3) selecting an instrument and administering the survey; (4) analyzing and interpreting the data; (5) feeding back survey results and developing action plans; (6) determining the financial impact of a survey; and (7) general. Section 1 guides the reader to pertinent information for understanding theories on attitudes and job satisfaction plus certain theoretical models implicit in some attitude survey approaches. Sections 2 through 6 include a representative sample of literature supporting the seven distinct phases of the attitude survey process. The final section lists general citations which deal with overall issues or with subjects which tend not to fit in one of the other six categories. (KGB)

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Margaret C. Blasingame

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A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE SURVEYS

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Special Report
August 1981

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Post Office Box P-1
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ISBN 0-912879-51-3

CG 018 433

Introduction

Interest in employee attitude surveys has grown significantly in recent years as organizations have become more and more concerned with such issues as declining productivity, third-party interventions affecting employer-employee relations, rising absenteeism/turnover rates, etc. This increased interest is largely due to the fact that many organizations have been able to minimize the effect of some of these issues by monitoring the level of employee job satisfaction and morale through properly conducted employee attitude surveys and then taking appropriate action.

Success with employee attitude surveys is contingent upon the thoroughness with which the entire project is carried out. To maximize this success, a seven-step process should be followed (see Section 7, Hawk, 1978). The first step involves assessing the organization's commitment toward such a project. To determine the level of commitment, some critical questions must be answered up front. For example, is it really the organization that wants to collect information on employee attitudes or is it just the human resource department supporting the project? Is management willing to act upon the survey results and report them back to the employees regardless of their degree of favorableness? Does the organization have the necessary skills to know what to do with the results? Without this necessary commitment, an attitude survey can result in more negative consequences than simply foregoing the project.

The second stage involves selecting an appropriate instrument. To do this properly, the objective(s) of the survey project must first be defined. Objectives can range anywhere from a simple, routine morale audit, to measuring attitudes relative to specific problems, or to using the survey as the basis for an OD intervention. How to collect the necessary data to meet the objective(s) depends upon the objective(s) itself/themselves and the professional staff available. Several alternatives exist: 1) purchase a commercially available survey, 2) develop an in-house questionnaire, 3) use surveys or scales from behavioral science research, or 4) retain a consultant to tailor design a survey. Of course, any combination of these can also be utilized if necessary.

Once the appropriate instrument has been chosen, careful attention should be given to administering the survey. This requires a host of decisions to be made. For instance, should we: survey the entire population or utilize a sampling strategy; mail the survey to the respondent's home or

administer it in-house in small-group sessions; protect the respondent's anonymity or not? Based on the answers to these questions, what is the most effective means of informing employees of the purpose and how the survey results will be used? Timing of the survey is equally important and care should be taken to avoid heavy workload periods or vacation schedule peaks. Unless the purpose of the survey is to monitor employees' reactions to an upcoming or recent organizational change or intervention, these periods should be avoided as well.

Having collected the completed questionnaires, the next phase entails analyzing and interpreting the data. Determining what the data really say and tying it to specific organizational elements so that appropriate follow-up plans can be made is no easy feat. It is necessary to look across all data to see if various "themes" emerge. To expose specific problem areas, the data should be "sliced" by demographic and/or organizational variables into the smallest subgroups feasible without revealing individual identity. When interpretation is not obvious, hypotheses must be generated which can later be reality tested in feedback sessions. During this step, the methods for presenting summarized survey results to employees and management must also be determined.

As soon as results have been analyzed and interpreted, feeding back the survey results to employees should take place. Ideally, this should be done in small-group sessions to test out and refine the initial interpretation of the data with the relevant survey respondent group. This method also offers employees an opportunity to participate in the development of action plans--thereby allowing them to feel ownership in the solution to problems. However, the degree to which employees are allowed to participate in the feedback sessions is, of course, a function of the organization's management style. Minimally, it is the organization's responsibility to at least provide employees with a summary of survey findings.

The sixth step involves developing action plans. Suggested solutions generated in feedback sessions must be evaluated, taking into consideration such things as costs, feasibility, organizational strategy, etc. Once decisions have been reached, management should inform employees of the course(s) of action to be taken, the steps involved, and the time frame for completion. This can be accomplished through the house organ, a letter to all employees, or some other appropriate mass media technique.

Finally, every effort should be made to show a relationship between attitudes and operational/financial indices.

Determining the financial impact of an attitude survey is frequently difficult and sometimes impossible. However, by focusing on the smallest self-contained organizational unit (e.g., department, shift, etc.) and collecting as much data as possible on such performance indicators as absenteeism, turnover, complaints or grievances, scrap rates, etc., correlations between the indicators monitored and the attitudes within the organizational unit can generally support the economic consequences of shifts in employee satisfaction.

Each of the seven steps of the attitude survey process just described is time consuming, costly, and at best frustratingly challenging. To ignore or gloss over any one of them increases the risk of failure. To follow them step by step should help produce a solid return on investment.

Purpose

This bibliography provides an up-to-date compilation of literature covering all aspects of the employee attitude survey process. It is intended for both researcher and practitioner. A wide variety of sources are represented and, with few exceptions, it focuses on the past 10-12 years of attitude survey research.

The 473 citations compiled have been categorized under seven separate headings. These categories are:

1. Understanding Job Satisfaction, Attitudes, and Motivation Theories (p. 1)
2. Assessing Organizational Commitment (p. 10)
3. Selecting an Instrument and Administering the Survey (p. 12)
4. Analyzing and Interpreting the Data (p. 21)
5. Feeding Back Survey Results and Developing Action Plans (p. 33)
6. Determining the Financial Impact of a Survey (p. 37)
7. General (p. 40)

Section 1 will guide the reader to pertinent information for understanding theories on attitudes and job satisfaction plus certain theoretical models implicit in some attitude survey approaches. Sections 2 through 6 include a representative sample of literature supporting the seven distinct phases of the attitude survey process (as described in the Introduction). The final section entitled "General" lists those citations which deal with overall issues or with subjects which tend not to fit neatly under any one of the other six categories.

In some cases the rationale for inclusion/categorization may not be immediately obvious. For instance, a few sources appear to deal with unique situations. However, upon review, it was believed that the study was generalizable regardless of the positions or organization involved. In cases where a citation could have been categorized under more than one section, it was placed in the section where it seemed most useful.

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Acknowledgements

To embark upon a bibliography of this magnitude requires the support and skills of numerous staff. I am indeed grateful to Donald L. Hawk, Vice President of Programs, for providing the "substructure" for this document. He alone is responsible for developing the seven-step process for conducting an effective attitude survey upon which this bibliography is based.

Without the unending dedication and expertise of our librarian Frank Freeman and his able assistant Karen R. Barden, this document would never have been as comprehensive or as accurate. And, of course, special thanks go to Josie Fuquay and Joanne Ferguson for their skillful typing and editorial assistance.

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